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Statement submitted by Alulbayt Foundation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2009/100.

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Statement*

The relevance of spiritual health care (6-9 July 2009)

A key aim of the ECOSOC health agenda is to meet the urban health challenge which is identified as poor living conditions in urban and peri-urban areas which are destroying lives, health, and social and moral values. And improvements in urban health will depend on coordinated action by all levels of government, health care providers, businesses, religious groups, social and educational institutions and citizens to remove problems such as drug abuse, violence and crime that indicate underlying social disorders. We would like to propose a greater emphasis placed on spiritual health care to alleviate these moral problems and social disorders.

By spiritual health care we do not merely mean a theological or worship-based spirituality. We advocate a wider definition of spirituality which is ethical, psychological and focused on understanding the self and one's personhood. This is based on the philosophy of Ali ibn Abī Tālib (the first Shi'a Imam, son-in-law and cousin of Prophet Muhammad) who said that he who truly knew himself, had known his Lord. Arguably, the idea behind this narration is to emphasize journeying within one's self to understand one's origin. Aside from the issue of belief, what is significant here is acquiring an inner worth with one's character. This is crucial to prevent social disorders which lead to crime, moral apathy, depression and a lack of direction in life.

Zayn Al-'Ābidīn (the fourth Shi'a Imam and grandson of Prophet Muhammad) uniquely stated even our organs have rights against us: "Your hands and stomach have rights against you." The deeper meaning behind this is to foster greater responsibility in human beings to be aware of actions they commit against themselves and each other.

In fact, the potential of spirituality has been elucidated by various scholars including Puchalski who stated that spirituality could be defined as whomever or whatever gives one a transcendent meaning in life. This is often expressed as religion or relationship with God, but it can also refer to other things: nature, energy, force, belief in the good of all, belief in the importance of family and community. The spirit is the essence of the person — what makes him or her unique. Milton W. Hay builds on such definitions and believes health-care staff can diagnose spiritual suffering in the following categories:

- Spiritual Suffering — interpersonal and/or intra-psychic anguish of unspecified origin
- Inner Resource Deficiency — diminished spiritual capacity
- Belief System Problem — lack of awareness of one's personal meaning system
- Religious Request — a specifically expressed religious request.

* Issued without formal editing.

In conclusion, Alulbayt Foundation proposes a practical application of spiritual health care by:

1. Promoting spiritual health care in palliative medicine for terminally ill patients who undergo physical and psychological suffering. The World Health Organization does not acutely define spirituality in terms of the self, personhood or soul.

2. Encouraging techniques of reflection and personal awareness within schools and the community to prevent social disorder.

3. A re-definition of suffering that doesn't just focus on elimination but management with inner worth.